GOVT 2306   
Federalism: Texas and the States within the National Governing Landscape  
Part One: Nations, States, and Local Governments

Introduction  
  
Prior to digging into the nature of government and politics in the states, it’s a good idea to place Texas – and all states – with the greater context of national government. Doing so allows us to look at the concept of federalism, and the relative roles that the national, state and local governments have within it. Federalism was one of the principles in the US Constitution we covered in GOVT 2305. Federalism can be defined as:   
  
“A system of government in which power is divided between a central authority and constituent political units.”  
  
The national and state governments are mentioned in the U.S. Constitution, but not local governments. As we will detail soon, they exist because states have the ability to issue charters or establish them in the Texas Constitution. Much of what we are doing in this section is applying this concept – narrowly – to the relationship between the national and state governments.

Here’s an important real life consequence of this arrangement. It adds to the complexity of the governing system. Wherever you happen to be, you are in the jurisdiction of multiple governments: one national, one state, and – potentially – a significant number on the local level. They do not always work in harmony. The goals of one – as expressed by the electorate – can be very different on the national, state and local level.

This should give you an idea about how complex and decentralized the governing environment is in the United States. It’s a list of the number of governments that exist at each level in the country.

National – 1  
State – 50  
Counties – 3,034  
Municipalities – 19,429  
Township – 16,504  
 School Districts – 13,506  
Special Districts – 35,052  
  
Source: US Census Bureau

Aside from federalism, there are two other options for what relationship can exist between a national and state government.   
  
- Unitary  
- Confederate

In a unitary system, the national government is supreme and the smaller units are given certain administrative tasks to perform. When we discuss Texas more thoroughly we will mention that this is the relationship that exists between the state governments and the counties. Most nations have unitary systems. In such a system, the national government has the ability to pass laws on a large number of subjects.

In a confederated system, the relationship is reversed. The state governments are supreme. The states establish a centralized apparatus to help coordinate activities between the state, but often it – purposely - has little independent power. The national government may only serve as a means by which conflicts between the states can be worked out. Very few nations are organized this way, but the United Nations is – which helps explain its weakness.  
  
- Federalism in the United States  
- Delegated Powers  
- Reserved Powers  
  
The United States’ governing system was the result of a compromise – the great compromise – that resulted in both the national and state governments having a degree of sovereign authority. The relationship is outlined in vague terms in the United States Constitution. It delegates certain powers to the national government – powers that are largely denied to the states – and reserves everything else to the states. The powers of the states relate to the health, safety, welfare and morals of the community – what are also referred to as the police powers.   
  
As originally written, the principle powers of the national government relate to security and commerce. Since then amendments have been added that have expanded national powers over the states. The most important being the addition of the equal protection clause in the 14th Amendment. In a federal system there is ongoing conflict regarding many of the functions performed by the national and state governments. What are the relative powers of each? In the US, the Constitution establishes guidelines, but there’s lots of wiggle room. We’ll get into nature of that wiggle room in the section that explores the stages of federalism. This picks up from some of what we discussed in 2305 – notably the conflict over interpreting and reinterpreting language in the US Constitution – specifically words like [commerce](http://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/commerce_clause) and what it means to [regulate commerce between the states](http://legal-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/Commerce+Clause), and how that [meaning has changed](http://www.bu.edu/rbarnett/Original.htm) over time.  
  
- Dual Sovereignty

As a consequence of federalism, authority – [sovereignty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sovereignty) - is split between two levels of government: The national and state. This is referred to as [dual sovereignty](http://www.cato.org/policy-report/septemberoctober-2011/rights-powers-dual-sovereignty-federalism). Understanding this concept should help you come to terms with much of the controversy between the state of Texas and the national government. Texas – for example – likes chemical refineries to be free from environmental rules. The US government does not. This often materializes as a conflict over whether the US Constitution grants the national government the power to regulate the production of chemicals. Despite dual sovereignty, according to the United States Constitution power ultimately resides with the national government.  
  
This is a consequence of the [supremacy clause](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supremacy_Clause).

If you’d like to review the concept of federalism itself, [click here for a great slide show](http://www.slideshare.net/christopherrice/federalism) put together by a University of Kentucky professor. See also the Wikipedia site on [Federalism in the United States](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federalism_in_the_United_States).

This brief introduction might require some additional clarification in order to establish what the words “nation,” “state” and “local government” refer to.   
  
**What is a nation?**

Here’s a definition: “a large body of people, associated with a particular territory, that is sufficiently conscious of its unity to seek or to possess a government peculiarly its own: *The president spoke to the nation about the new tax.”*   
  
That’s still a bit loose. A nation is an entity that possesses territory and for which there are no external powers that are involved in its domestic institutions. The extent of national powers depends on the specific constitution adopted in a given nation.  
  
See: [Nation state](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nation_state).

As governing entities, nations are not that old. The modern concept of a nation was developed in the mid 1650s with the signing of the [treaty of Westphalia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peace_of_Westphalia) which ended over 100 years of religious warfare in Europe. Empires based on hereditary monarchies were replaced with [sovereign nations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Westphalian_sovereignty) with defined borders. Each nation had to respect the territorial integrity of the others and agreed not to interfere with each other’s internal affairs (at least officially). Prior to this – during the era of monarchies - governing occurred within “kingdoms.” The extent of control depended on military strength and these could always shift. Click here for a look at how borders have changed in Europe over the last 1000 years.

A key question for any nation is whether it has control over domestic security within its borders. Can it do two things?

1 – compel people to follow the law  
2 – compel people to pay taxes

If a nation can’t do either, it may be – and probably is - a failed state. Somalia is what is commonly referred to as a “[failed state](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Failed_state).” This is as good a definition as any: A region with “a central government so weak or ineffective that it has little practical control over much of its territory.” Click here for the [failed states’ index of 2013](http://ffp.statesindex.org/rankings-2013-sortable). Note that the US ranks 159th out of 178th on the list.

FYI: As of January 3, 2012 the US State Department recognizes [195 independent nations](http://geography.about.com/gi/o.htm?zi=1/XJ&zTi=1&sdn=geography&cdn=education&tm=12&gps=395_510_809_848&f=00&tt=2&bt=1&bts=0&zu=http%3A//www.state.gov/s/inr/rls/4250.htm).

**What is a State?**

Given that this class focuses on states. We’ll spend much more time looking at this term.  
  
Here are two [definitions](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/state):   
1 -  a politically organized body of people usually occupying a definite territory; *especially* **:**  one that is sovereign  
2 -  one of the constituent units of a nation having a federal government

Note that the terms “state” and “nation” are often used to mean the same thing. That’s what you see in the first definition. The second definition is more applicable here. Yes this can be confusing. Texas is a state. One of 50. Hopefully you knew that. In the United States (note the name), states – 13 of them - preceded and created the national government at least partly as a way to ensure that differences among them could be worked out effectively. They also allowed for the creation of other states, and 37 were added over the course of time.

As you probably know, the original 13 states started as colonies, which were able to be established due to charters granted by the British Crown. We will cover the nature of these charters soon. They provided the bases for the constitutions each state would establish later. A union of the states was necessary to break with Great Britain. But there was little agreement about what the nature of that arrangement would be, though there was a shared understanding that cooperation was necessary. Here’s – another – relevant quote from Benjamin Franklin.

“We must, indeed, all hang together or, most assuredly, we shall all hang separately.”  
  
The colonies had a love hate relationship with each other. They needed to cooperate, but were unwilling to give up much autonomy. They each wanted some control of their own affairs. It took several tries to figure out what relationship worked best. The two that are most important for us here are the ones established in the [Articles of Confederation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Articles_of_Confederation) and the [United States Constitution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Constitution).

The former established a confederacy with each state retaining sovereignty – no such thing as national sovereignty – and very little in terms of institutional strength on the national level. This was fine for state interests, but some interests – business interests primarily – wanted a stronger national government to establish and enforce policies nationally. That’s what led to the Constitutional Convention and the U.S. Constitution (more on that in the next set of slides).   
  
For our purposes here it’s important to understand that the Constitution established the process by which the new states could be established. In addition, the combination of the states led to strength on the national level that allowed for the United States to claim all western lands relatively quickly. One of the areas of early controversy was the fact that the early states that bordered the west [claimed all territory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_cessions) to the Mississippi River. The land locked state protested and ultimately all states ceded those lands to the national government which then worked out a process by which these lands became new states. This is how we ended up with 50, rather than stuck with 13.  
  
I want to walk quickly through the process by which the national government acquired, settled and governed the land westward. It happened very quickly and involved a variety of treaties.  
  
- [Click here for a You Tube video showing the process](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rNikVbS0BAQ).

The British Government gave up claims to the land westward up to the Mississippi River in the [Treaty of Paris](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Paris_(1783)) – which ended the Revolutionary War in 1783. Then the question became: What should be done with this land? There was a lot lying between the original 13 colonies and the Pacific Ocean in 1787. And most of it was claimed by Spain. By nationalizing the US was in a better position to increase its power so that it could acquire the land to the west.   
  
Part of what the national government provided was a mechanism for effectively claiming that land and moving westward – and beyond. Under the Articles of Confederation there was no power in existence that could prevent states from claiming whatever they choose to in terms of western lands. Many states did however. Nevertheless under the Articles of Confederation the Congress passed legislation establishing how new states could be admitted to the union.

No process for creating new states was established in the Articles of Confederation itself but the Congress passed two laws, the [Land Ordinance of 1785](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Land_Ordinance_of_1785) and the [Northwest Ordinance](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northwest_Ordinance), that did so. We discussed these briefly in the opening section of the class. Surveyors were very popular people during that period, they’re the ones who knew where the best plots of land were. George Washington was surveyor prior to becoming a military man.

Westward expansion was made easier by the federal system established under the Constitution. This entire process encouraged further [expansion westward](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_territorial_acquisitions) in a process later called [manifest destiny](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manifest_destiny). The opening up of the west led to rampant [land speculation](http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3401802314.html), which in turn led to boom and bust cycles. This was argued to be a leading cause of the [Panic of 1819](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panic_of_1819).

Over time the map of the US took a shape that we recognize today. Here’s a nice graphic showing the gradual process. Note that the acquisition of many of these territories was the result of a treaty, which is a power that is fully delegated to the national government. Most American States were created out of federal territories.  
  
Texas was one of a small handful of states that were not federal territories prior to becoming states. Here’s a list of the others:   
  
- [**Vermont**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vermont), an unrecognized but de facto [independent republic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vermont_Republic) until its admission in 1791[- [**Kentucky**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kentucky), a part of Virginia until its admission in 1792.  
- [**Maine**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maine), a part of Massachusetts until its admission in 1820 following the [Missouri Compromise](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Missouri_Compromise)  
  
**-** [**Texas**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Texas), a recognized [independent republic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic_of_Texas) until its admission in 1845  
- [**California**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/California), created as a state (as part of the [Compromise of 1850](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Compromise_of_1850)) out of the [unorganized territory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unorganized_territory) of the [Mexican Cession](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mexican_Cession) in 1850 without ever having been a separate organized territory itself[  
- [**West Virginia**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Virginia): During the [Civil War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Civil_War) Virginia had two state governments, a Unionist one and a Confederate one, both claiming to be the legitimate state government of Virginia. West Virginia was created in 1863 by the [Unionist state government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Restored_Government_of_Virginia) from areas of western Virginia, after the Confederate state government's 1861 secession of Virginia to the [Confederate States of America](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confederate_States_of_America).

All the rest began as territories, which is significant. Those states do not control much of the open undeveloped land within their borders. Texas does because that land was never federal territory. Let’s walk through the expansion of the United States during this period.   
  
- [Here’s a link to a video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rwGRheUQMY8) that walks through the expansion.

It can be argued that manifest destiny – the idea that the United States should work to control all lands westward, if not all of North America – was justified based on the commercial and military powers delegated to national government in the United States Constitution. The commercial potential of the nation, as well as its ability to defend itself, was enhanced by westward expansion.   
  
**The Louisiana Purchase**

Argued by some at the time – and even now – to have been unconstitutional, this ensured that the United States had free access to the Mississippi River as well as control of New Orleans, the port where the Mississippi meets the Gulf of Mexico. This ensured that commerce from the middle of the nation could be traded globally. All the land below is connected to the world through the Mississippi River.   
  
- Click here for more on the [Louisiana Purchase](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louisiana_Purchase).

In addition to purchasing Louisiana, the Jefferson Administration was responsible for authorizing and funding the [Lewis and Clark Expedition](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lewis_and_Clark_Expedition) in order to explore the newly acquired territory. Doing so helped map the northern part of Louisiana and the northwestern portion of what would become the United States after the acquisition of the Oregon Territory.  
  
**Red River Basin**  
  
The northern border of the United States was clarified in the [Treaty of 1818](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_1818). But it did not resolve disputes further west. These would be addressed in the Oregon Treaty.

**Florida Treaty**  
  
This is also known as [The Adams – Onis Treaty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adams%E2%80%93On%C3%ADs_Treaty). This further modified the border of the land acquired in the Louisiana Purchase – notably the parts that would later become Texas – in exchange for Florida and the Gulf Coast extending to the Sabine River.

**The Annexation of Texas**  
  
We will look a bit more deeply at the [Texas Annexation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Texas_annexation) in an upcoming section so there’s no need to spend too much time on it right now. One thing worth mentioning now is that even though Texas claimed all the lands within the defined borders, it did not control it, especially the lands to the west. The plains would not be controlled up until the 1880s. This made commercial transaction difficult. [Here’s an account of a commercial and military expedition](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Texan_Santa_Fe_Expedition) that attempted to travel through northern Texas to Santa Fe. It didn’t go well. What’s more, Mexico still considered Texas to belong to it. This explains the rationale behind the [The Mexican American War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mexican%E2%80%93American_War).   
  
**The Mexican Session**  
  
[The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Guadalupe_Hidalgo) was the agreement signed after the Mexican American War. It led not only to Mexico giving up claims to Texas, but led to the acquisition of the territory that would be the bulk of what is now the southwestern US. This is referred to as the [The Mexican Session of 1848](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mexican_Cession).   
  
**The Oregon Treaty**

[The Oregon Treaty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oregon_Treaty) of 1846 resolved a [dispute over the boundary](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oregon_boundary_dispute) between what is now Canada and the northwest United States. Britain and the United States split control of the entire Oregon Territory until a decision was made to divide it along the 49th parallel.  
  
This means that by 1846 the United States had possession of all the land west of the original colonies. The United States not only had ports along the Atlantic Ocean, but the Pacific Ocean as well as the Gulf of Mexico. The United States was well positioned to engage in international trade once it was developed.

**The Gadsden Purchase**

This was a small piece of land that pushed the southern border of the United States further south. The land was purchased from Mexico in 1853. The reason was to facilitate transportation west. The land was flatter than the land further north and seemed to provide better possible routes for railroads. This made coast to coast commerce cheaper. [James Gadsden](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Gadsden) was the Ambassador to Mexico when he negotiated the purchase, but prior to that he had been [a railroad executive](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Gadsden). He was president of the [South Carolina Railroad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Carolina_Railroad) from 1840 – 1950.

**Alaska and Hawaii**  
  
The [Territory of Alaska](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Territory_of_Alaska) was [acquired](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alaska_Purchase) in 1867 from Russia. Russia sold it because it was concerned that Britain was about to take over the territory. They wanted to cash in. Some in the United States wanted to go further and annex British Columbia. Purchasing Alaska helped minimize British influence over western ports and drive Russia out of the New World. [Hawaii](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Territory_of_Hawaii) was [acquired](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liliuokalani) – or conquered if you prefer - while the United States was expanding its presence internationally. It provided a base in the middle of the Pacific Ocean for commercial and military activities further west.

Turning Territories into States  
  
As each of these territories was acquired, states are gradually carved out of them. Each was done in its own unique way – which would take some time to go over here, but a recent book and television show does so: How the States got their Shapes. [Click here to get a copy](http://www.amazon.com/How-States-Got-Their-Shapes/dp/0061431397) – it’s a fun read. And [click here](http://www.history.com/shows/how-the-states-got-their-shapes/videos) for [full episodes](http://www.history.com/shows/how-the-states-got-their-shapes/videos) from the show. The United States has more than just states. Click here for [a video](http://www.vox.com/2014/7/3/5868743/what-maps-of-america-get-wrong) that shows the other territories. And [here’s an additional video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJxrTzfG2bo) that shows the land the United States acquired between 1776 and 1887.

The point behind all this is that a direct consequence of the establishment of a more powerful national government in the United States Constitution was the acquisition of the land that would become the 50 states. Once established, states have an equal political status – legally - with the national government. This is due to dual sovereignty – each of these two levels has its own independent connection to the general population. We’ll review the issues this arrangement raises as well as the relative powers divided among the national and state governments in the Constitution.

As we will see soon enough, the U.S. Constitution does not list the powers of the states, though it does have a list of powers denied to the states. Instead it lists the powers of the national government (and calls them delegated powers) and states that all the rest are delegated to the states. One of these powers is the ability to create local governments. So let’s turn to them and make some general observations.

**Local Governments**

Local governments are complex. Here is the list of the number of each type as counted by the Census Bureau a few years back:   
   
Counties – 3,034  
Municipalities – 19,429  
Township – 16,504  
 School Districts – 13,506  
Special Districts – 35,052  
  
Local governments come in different forms, but there are two basic types: Multi-Purpose and Single-Purpose. The difference between the two should be obvious. The former serves a variety of functions while the latter serve one specified function. Cities and counties are multi-purpose governments. The functions of counties are defined by the state – you will see that we define counties as administrative wings of the state. The functions of cities are largely defined by the city itself – though they are influenced by the states in various ways. There are many types of single purpose governments. These include independent school districts along with many others.

A quick point – one made before and that will be repeated in future sections – none of these types of local governments are created by, or mentioned in, the US Constitution. The creation of local government falls under the reserved powers of the states. They are created by the states and are under the authority of the states. We will dig into this further soon enough. Within the American federal system, local governments are responsible for implementing what are called the “[police powers](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/467323/police-power),” meaning the power to regulate the health, safety, morals and welfare of the public.

What is a city?

A [city](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/City) is a settlement that is generally based on some shared set of economic interests that has been granted legal status – including a [city charter](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charter_city) (click here for [Houston’s](http://www.houstontx.gov/charter/)) - by the state. This allows them to make, implement and adjudicate their own laws. The official, legal term for a city is a [municipal corporation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Municipal_corporation). [Article 11 of the Texas Constitution](http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/Docs/CN/htm/CN.11.htm) establishes how municipal corporations are to be chartered. Alvin and Houston are both cities – with the obvious difference. Cities generally develop because of an economic incentive for people to live in proximity with each other. Think of Houston – and much of the local area – and the oil business, in addition to trade and the development of other raw materials.   
  
Key point: Cities are very different than the other types of governments listed here. Cities begin as economic entities first – places where people find opportunities to work – and then become legal entities once they do so. This is done when they are able to apply for the right to have a charter which allows them to pass and execute laws and to collect taxes. All the other levels of government begin – more or less – as legally defined governing units and then attempt to become economically sufficient.  
  
- For more on this point, you might want to look at this: [Communities Aren't Just Places, They're Social Networks](http://www.citylab.com/work/2012/10/communities-arent-places-theyre-social-networks/3492/)

This means that cities have an organic quality since they are composed of people and institutions that are physically connected to each other. What this means is that public policy priorities in cities tend to focus on whatever is necessary to ensure that people are able to live together peacefully, as well as enhance economic opportunities in the city. Houston, especially, focuses on making the city a center of economic growth.

Much more than nations or states, cities have an identity – a look – that results from the fact that many people choose to live in close proximity with each other. And they can take different shapes that reflect where people choose to live. These shapes can also change depending on how cities evolve – which itself is a consequence of how economically successful a given city is. Cities – especially the larger ones - tend to contain within them diverse populations and interests.  
  
Despite Texas’ image as a rural state, close to 90% of residents in the state live in cities. Texas also contains within it some of the largest cities in the nation. This is based on estimates from 2006:  
  
1. New York, New York - 8,214,426  
2. Los Angeles, California - 3,849,378  
3. Chicago, Illinois - 2,833,321  
**4. Houston, Texas - 2,144,491**  
5. Phoenix, Arizona - 1,512,986  
6. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania - 1,448,394  
**7. San Antonio, Texas - 1,296,682**  
8. San Diego, California - 1,256,951  
**9. Dallas, Texas - 1,232,940**  
10. San Jose, California - 929,936

The relative size of cities varies over time. [Wikipedia has a page](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Largest_cities_in_the_United_States_by_population_by_decade) listing how the rankings of the top ten cities in population have changed over time. The change in the size of cities is also a reflection of changes in the national economy.  
  
For more stuff:   
- Click here for [city-data info](http://www.city-data.com/city/Texas.html) about Texas cities.   
- [The National League of Cities](http://www.nlc.org/).  
- [Click here](http://www.nlc.org/build-skills-networks/resources/cities-101/local-u-s--governments) for the NLC’s description of local governments.

**What is a County?**

A [county](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/County_(United_States)) is a political subdivision within a state that is assigned some government functions. Counties are the administrative units of the state. These functions will be detailed more fully in a later section, but they include maintaining birth and death records, conducting elections, tax assessment and law enforcement in unincorporated areas. It is also referred to as an [administrative division](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Administrative_division). What this means is that generally counties are limited in what they can do based on what the state has them do. Larger counties – Harris County especially – can have a degree of discretion due to its size, but they still primarily implement state laws.

Brazoria County is one of 254 in the state. They are responsible for carrying out the bulk of the laws passed by the state.  
  
This allows for a degree of local control of legislation, which is a key principle within the Texas Constitution.

Texas has [254 counties](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_counties_in_Texas) that range greatly in size and population. They are intended to assist in the administration of the law throughout the state. They also diversify the funding mechanisms necessary to run the state.  
  
- [US Census info](http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/maps/texas_map.html).  
- [Texas Association of Counties](http://www.county.org/).

In a future section we will look through [Article 9 of the Texas Constitution](http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/Docs/CN/htm/CN.9.htm) which covers counties. Counties exist because the state establishes them.  
  
The state also defines the type of governing system that counties can have.

Cities and counties have a complex relationship since they have similar jurisdictions. It can be confusing determining what is a city’s responsibilities and what is a county’s responsibilities.   
  
 We will explore this conflict over the course of the class.

Here is are some of the cities in Brazoria County

Some cities and counties have consolidated governments. [The National League of Cities](http://www.nlc.org/build-skills-and-networks/resources/cities-101/city-structures/list-of-consolidated-city-county-governments) [provides a list of them here](http://www.nlc.org/build-skills-and-networks/resources/cities-101/city-structures/list-of-consolidated-city-county-governments). Examples include San Francisco, Denver, Lexington, and New Orleans.  
  
Texas does not have these types of systems.

Single Purpose Governments

What is a single purpose government?

Just like it sounds like – it is a government that is established to serve a defined purpose.  
  
Like providing subsidized college education. Alvin Community College is itself a single purpose government. There are many others.

Cities and counties are sometimes referred to as multi purpose governments, since they serve a variety of functions.   
  
Some functions, however, are granted to specific governing units. These are called single (or [special](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special-purpose_district)) purpose governments.

The one you might be best familiar with is the [independent school district](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/School_district). You are probably also familiar with the community college district, at least Alvin’s.

See this entry in TSHA:   
[Special Tax District](http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/mwt01).

From the TSHA site: *“Other special districts include over 900 water and utility districts, 326 housing authorities, 210 soil and water conservation districts, 86 hospital districts, 46 hospital authorities, 10 rural fire prevention districts, 8 mosquito control districts, 8 health districts, 5 noxious weed control districts, 3 three urban renewal agencies, 3 wind erosion conservation districts, one waste disposal authority, and one ground water subsidence district.”*

In the section on local governments we will go through the different single purpose governments established in the local area.

Here are a couple more you may be familiar with:

The Port of Houston Authority  
  
[History](http://www.houstonsports.org/history/)

The Harris County – Houston Sports Authority  
  
[History](http://www.portofhouston.com/about-us/history/)

Local governments also set up special, narrowly defined tax districts that allow residents or business interests in those districts to provide either basic services or special services approved by voters.

Here are examples:

[Municipal Utility Districts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Municipal_Utility_District): a small district established in order to provide public utilities to an area – quite often a newly created subdivision.

[Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tax_Increment_Reinvestment_Zone):   
  
[Click here](http://www.houstontx.gov/finance/ecodev/tirz.html) for a description if TIRZs from the City of Houston’s website.

[Municipal Management Districts](http://www.texasahead.org/tax_programs/munmanagement/)  
  
Similar to TIRZ’s. They allow property owners within the district to impose property taxes to pay for improvements to a district beyond what is otherwise provided for by the city and state. Example: The [Houston Downtown Management District](http://www.downtowndistrict.org/Home/AboutUs/Governance/).

That’s enough of a description of these specific levels of government for now – more on these later.   
  
The point is to know what these various governments are, and the fact that federalism is a very system is complex.

Local Councils of Government

The fact that populations centers are overseen by a large number of governments means that establishing coherent public policy in them can be difficult.   
  
The forces which drive the behavior of one may not be the same as those driving the behavior of others. In fact they can sometimes run counter to each other. The decisions made by one can create problems for the others.

In addition, coordinating policies that affect the various areas mutually can be difficult.   
  
A recent example was the management of the evacuation of the area during Hurricanes Rita and Ike. No one entity had the authority to impose a way to evacuate the area – which is why it was chaotic.

Issues of mutual concern – like transportation, drainage, crime prevention, and economic development – require coordination however.

A great recent example was the necessity for all levels of government to respond in a coordinated manner to the Ebola outbreak in Dallas.

The state of Texas developed regional councils of government in order to help coordinate

Here’s a map of the 24 regions in the state.

The local area is in the [Houston – Galveston Area Council](http://www.h-gac.com/home/residents.aspx).

A final topic

The pros and cons of federalism.

Now, a brief discussion on whether this design is a good thing.  
  
Federalism has its detractors and supporters.

Its not the easiest system to manage. Unitary systems, where sovereignty rests with the national government, and confederated systems, where it rests with the states governments, are simpler in concept.   
  
Its tough to have two (and maybe three or more) bosses.

Each of these has a defined area of authority and some sense of autonomy, meaning that they can attempt to do what they choose to do without interference from other governing systems.   
  
But the things one government can does can create problems for others.

The traffic or drainage problems in one area can be the result of developments promoted in another.  
  
Coordinating local governments can be difficult to do – as well as states – can be difficult to do.

This should help illustrate a central dilemma of federalism.   
  
It attempts to balance the desire for self control (sovereignty) against the desire to coordinate and cooperate with other governments and institutions sharing the same set of interests.

But this arrangement is argued to have advantages. Certain policies may be best suited to be designed and implemented on certain levels of government.   
  
We will this question repeatedly in this class.

States can serve as “[laboratories of democracy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laboratories_of_democracy).”  
  
50 different solutions to a problems is likely to lead to successful outcome if nothing else than by trial and error.

Same thing with cities.  
  
Different cities experimenting with different policies can provide real world examples of the effects of those policies.

For example: Will increases in the minimum wage decrease the number of jobs in a city? We wont really know unless it is tested out.

We will cover current disputes regarding the relationships between these levels of government as over the course of the semester.   
  
For now, get comfortable with the nature of each of these levels of government, what they are and what they do. We will build off of them soon enough.

Next Section:   
  
The Federal System as designed in the U.S. Constitution.